


Indian Folk Tales

Mulk Raj Anand





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Retold by
Mulk Raj Anand

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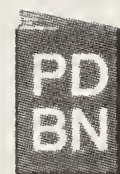


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Preface

After writing his epic novels and long short stories, Leo Tolstoy felt the need to retell the stories told to him by the folk near Yasnaya Polyana.

The simplicity, the vitality, and the abandon of the folk imagination was the source of the Greek plays and novels.

The gods, heroes, demons, witches, fairies, birds, beasts and flowers in the folk tales of India, were the overflow from anonymous pool of imaginative literature of our people.

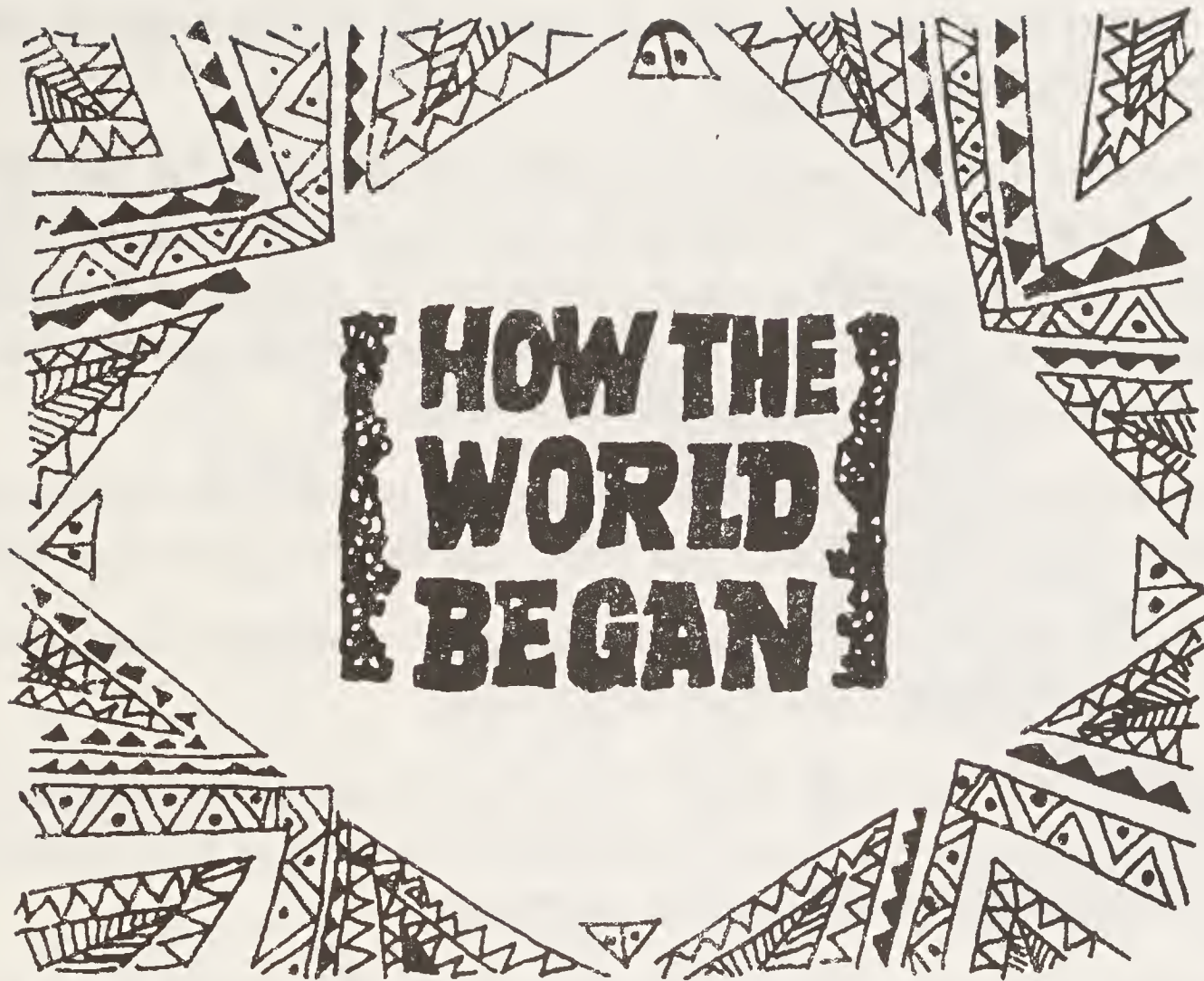
I go to these sources again and again, in order to bring back the gift of laughter and tears, which is necessary in order to bear the yoke of pity that every writer must carry.

Khandalla
Maharashtra, May 1990

MULK RAJ ANAND

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| How the World Began | 1 |
| The Sun, the Moon, the Wind and the Sky | 6 |
| The Lion and the Goat | 9 |
| Castles in the Air | 12 |
| A Love Story | 15 |
| The Crane and the Fish | 24 |
| The Princess Who Loved Her Father Like Salt | 29 |
| The Brahmin, the Tiger and the Jackal | 37 |
| The Tortoise Who Talked Too Much | 43 |



Once upon a time, there lived a mighty wrestler in Iran. One day someone, who had travelled to India, told him that there was a wrestler in Hindustan mightier than he. The Persian wrestler's pride was hurt. He at once decided to go and challenge the Indian. So he went to the bazaar. And, buying a hundred thousand maunds of wheat flour, put it in a bundle on his head and set off.

By evening he had reached the edge of a lake on the borders of Hindustan. He was feeling hungry and thirsty. So he knelt beside the lake and, putting his mouth to it, half emptied it of water with one gulp. From the rest he made a porridge by emptying some of his flour. With this he satisfied his hunger. Then he fell asleep.

Now, an elephant used to come to drink at the lake every morning. When the beast came at dawn the next day, he found the lake empty. "What shall I do?" he asked himself, 'There is no water to be found for a thousand miles anywhere!' He was going away disappointed when he saw the wrestler sleeping comfortably on the edge of the lake. He knew at once from the proportions of the wrestler's body that he had drunk all the water. So he rushed angrily and trampled upon the man's head. But the wrestler only turned on his side and said: "Not so gently. My headache

won't be cured by such soft pats on the head. If you want to press my head, press it more vigorously."

The elephant stood back angry when he saw that his stamping had not hurt the wrestler. Then he thought: 'I will teach this brute a lesson. But the wrestler was now getting up to continue his journey. He caught hold of the elephant by the waist. And, wrapping him in his blanket, he swung him over his shoulder and started off for India.

A few strides and he reached the house of his rival. He shouted for him: "Come out, O you, Rustum of Hind, come and give me a fall!"

"He is not at home," answered the Indian wrestler's wife, shyly. "He has gone to fetch some fuel from the jungle."

"All right, I will call back again. But please accept this present I have brought for him!" And he threw the bundle containing the elephant over the wall of the mud-house into the courtyard.

"Oh mother, mother! Look! This rival of your son has thrown a rat into our house!" exclaimed the Indian wrestler's wife.

"Never mind, child," came the voice of her mother-in-law. "Never you mind! My son will teach him good manners soon! Just put a trap and catch the rat... We will throw it away."

The Persian wrestler heard all this and thought: "Well, if the huge body of an elephant appears like a rat to the Indian wrestler's wife, what will I look like to the wrestler?"

But he mustered up courage and went in search of his rival into the jungle. He had only taken a few steps when he saw the Indian wrestler coming home with a thousand cartloads of fuel on his head. "Here's a worthy match, indeed," he thought.

"I have heard of your fame and I have come from Iran to fight you, friend!" he said to the Indian wrestler.

"Welcome, with all my heart!" replied the Indian wrestler. "I will give you a fight. But let us do it in the city amphitheatre before an audience. What is the fun of fighting without applause?"

"But I am in a hurry to get back!" said the Persian. "So come, let us have with it here and now. As for the audience, look, there is an old



woman toddling along. I will go and ask her to come and watch.” Saying this, he shouted: “O Mother! O Mother; stop and watch our contest!”

“I can’t, my son, I can’t,” replied the woman, “my daughter has stolen my camels and I am running to catch her. But if you would like to come and wrestle on the palms of my hands, I shall be willing to judge the match as I go along.”

And the wrestlers jumped on to the palm of the old woman's right hand and came to grips, while she sped along over hills and dales.

When the old woman's daughter saw her in the distance, with two hefty wrestlers struggling to throw each other on her hand, she was frightened. She thought they were the soldiers her mother had brought to catch her. But when she saw that they were only two wrestlers, she caught hold of both her mother and the wrestlers. Tying them with the hundred and sixty camels she was driving, all in a bundle, and putting the package on her head, she set off.

One of the camels, however, was hungry. Putting his head out of the bundle he began to make noises. The old woman's daughter just plucked a tree or two and thrust it for fodder into his mouth.

Upon this the farmer who owned the field raised an alarm, shouting: "Thief! Thief! Stop the thief!"



The girl did not like this noise. So she bundled the farmer, his field, his ox, his horse and his plough, all in the blanket, and ran. Soon she reached a town and felt hungry. So she picked up a baker's shop, and all the town too, in her bundle and made off.

At last, she came to a field where there was a big water melon growing. As she was feeling thirsty, she broke it into two and ate the marrow. Then she put her bundle into the rind and, pillowing it under her head, fell asleep.

A big flood arose while she lay asleep and carried off the melon, till it floated to the edge of the sea. The top rind fell off. Out walked the old woman, the wrestlers, the camels, the trees, the farmer, the ox, the horse, the plough, the baker and all the other things.

And that was how the world began.





Once upon a time when the world was young, the Sun, the Moon and the Wind went to dine with their uncle and aunt, Thunder and Lightning. Their mother, the Sky, blessed them, and wishing them a merry party, waited for their return.

Now, both the Sun and the Wind were very greedy and selfish little boys. They ate all the rich food that was given to them by their uncle and aunt. They did not think of their poor hungry mother, who was sitting at home praying that they be happy and enjoy themselves at the party. The gentle little moon alone did not forget her mother. Of every dainty dish that was put before her, she kept a little to take away to her mother.

‘Well children, what have you brought for me?’ said the mother of the Sun, the Moon and the Wind, when they returned home at night.

‘What do you mean woman?’ asked the Sun, who was her eldest child, insolently. ‘What do you expect me to bring for you? I went to dinner to eat and enjoy myself. Not to bring food for you! Besides, you cannot appreciate such delicacies as we were given – with your coarse ways of eating!’

‘To be sure!’ echoed the little brat Wind. ‘You don’t know how to eat!’



Nor can you grind, because you have no teeth in your mouth! And how could you expect us to spoil our silk clothes by stuffing up our pockets with food for you! It is rude to fill our hankies with food. It is not done in good houses. But how should you know of manners, good or bad?

‘Don’t be so rude, brutes!’ interrupted the docile Moon. ‘It seems you don’t know manners, talking to our mother like that! Then, consoling the old woman, she said, ‘Mother, taste this dinner I have brought for you. It is a little of everything we were given.’

‘May you live long, my Moonchild!’ said the old woman. And she turned indignantly to her sons: ‘The curses of Heaven shall fall on your two heads. You my eldest, you went out to feast and never thought of your old mother, though she slaves for you all day! You shall roast in eternal fire! Your rays shall be scorching hot! You will burn all that you



touch. And men will hate you when you appear in your pride!..... And you, my little scamp Wind! Greedy and selfish! You will always blow in dry weather and shall parch or shrivel all you touch. Men shall detest you when you are about!...And you, my sweet daughter, you who thought of your mother, you shall flourish always! You will be cool! Calm! Soft! Beautiful! Men and women will be full of love when they see you. And they will sing to you and call you blessed!

This is why the Sun is hated when it shines too hotly. The Wind is despised when it blows strongly. And the Moon is loved by all.





Once upon a time there was a herd of goats that went to graze in the jungle every day.

One day they were returning home at twilight. One of their number, an old she-goat, became tired and was left behind. Darkness fell. She could not find her way back. So she found refuge in a cave that she saw nearby.

What was her surprise when she went in and found a lion seated there.

She was terrified and stood still. Then she collected her wits about her. She thought of what she could do. 'If I try to run,' she said to herself, 'the lion will soon catch me. But if I have courage I may manage to survive.'

She walked up to the lion, without showing any sign of fear. The lion looked at her. He looked and looked and did not know what to make of this goat. So unlike the other members of her tribe. None of them had ever dared to face him. At last he thought she could not be a goat, but some strange animal which he had not seen before.

'Who are you, oldie?' he asked.



'I am the queen of goats,' she replied. 'I am a devotee of God Shiva. I have to devour a hundred tigers, twenty-five elephants and ten lions, in his honour every year. I have already eaten hundred tigers, and twenty-five elephants. Now I am looking for ten lions.'

The lion was disturbed to hear this. Believing that the goat had really come to devour him, he crept out of the cave, saying he was going to wash his face on the river nearby.

As he was rushing out he met a jackal. Seeing the king of the beasts in a panic he asked what was the matter.

The lion told the jackal of his meeting with what he said was a strange animal. Very much like a goat, but not timid.

The jackal was very clever. He guessed that the cause of the lion's fear was only a miserable oldie-goat. And he told him that it was a ruse of the feeble, old goat to escape being devoured by the lion.

'Calm yourself and come back with me to your cave, and make a meal of this pretender!' he said.

The lion took his advice and returned with the jackal.

The goat saw the lion returning. She knew that it was the wily jackal with him who had brought him back. But she did not lose courage. She walked up towards them. And, putting on a stiff pose, she said to the jackal:

‘Is this the way you carry out my orders? I sent you to fetch me ten lions to eat at once. You have brought only one. I shall eat you!’

As soon as the lion heard this, he thought he had been tricked by the jackal. He fell on him in a fury and gobbled him up.

The goat slipped out of the cave and escaped from the lion's paws.





Once upon a time there lived a Brahmin boy in India who did no work and was always building castles in the air.

One day his mother told him he was wasting his time. And she persuaded him to do something. Luckily, as he was then feeling bored with himself, he listened to her advice. But the question was what he should do.

He had not the learning to be a priest. He was too weak of body to be a soldier. And, as he was a Brahmin, he did not want to do any dirty work. So he decided he would be a businessman.

'What would you like to sell?' his mother asked. She suggested various things: grain, cloth, spices. He said: 'I want to sell shiny glass bangles and pots of coloured clay!'

His mother gave him the money to buy what he wanted. He bought a basketful of glassware. And he sat down in the market square to await the coming of customers. As the silken colours of the glass before him glistened when the sunshine played on them, the rays lifted his thoughts across the sky to soar on high.

'I shall sell these things at a profit today,' he said to himself. 'With that

money I shall buy imitation pearls and sell them as real. I shall make a hundred rupees by doing this.

With that money, I shall buy some goats. They will have young ones every six months. So I shall have a whole herd of goats.

With the goats I shall buy cows. As soon as they have calved, I shall sell the calves and buy buffaloes.

With the profit on the sale of the buffaloes, I shall buy mares.

When the mares have colts, I shall have plenty of horses. I shall sell them and get plenty of gold. With the gold I shall build a castle on the mountain peak, and plant garden bowers.

The Raja of Hastinapura will hear of it. He will offer me the hand of his daughter with a large dowry. I shall accept her in marriage and I will have a son by her. When the boy is old enough to dance on my knee, I shall sit in the courtyard of my palace and beckon him to come and get irritated by his pranks and scold him. He will begin to shriek. I shall call my wife to come and take him away. She will be busy doing some



household work. I shall get up and give her such a kick as will never let her bones be idle afterwards.'

The force of this resolve drove him to make his day-dream into deed.



Lo! he gave such a furious kick that all the glass and earthenwares in his basket were shattered to pieces on the ground before him.



Every twelve years, in a town near the place where the Ganga falls from the mountains a fair is held to which come the rich and the poor from all parts of Hindustan.

To one of these fairs came a king with his daughter.

Now, it so happened that this king and his daughter pitched their tents opposite the place where a young prince had his camp. One day, as this prince was going out to the temple to worship, what was his surprise but to hear a song, honeyed with words of love. For days afterwards, however much he tried, he could not forget that tune. Sad he sat down to pray that he should forget it. But the strains of the strings that had come to his ears on the wings of song, haunted him. He gave up all hope of forgetting it. Or of tracking it to its source. Then, suddenly, he saw in the camp opposite him, lying on a couch in the garden, a lovely maiden. The moon in the sky bent in shame before her face.

‘Oh, how beautiful she is!’ he thought. ‘I wish I could talk to her!’ Luckily for him, at the same time the princess saw him and thought to herself; ‘He is the idol for whom I have longed. It is for him that strings of my lute weep.’



Each of them waited for the sight of the other, as the sitar waits for the song. They saw each other. They longed to meet. But they were far away from each other, though near.

When the fair was over, the father of the princess ordered the servants to prepare to leave. The prince watched the stir in the camp of his beloved. He stood wondering what to do. Suddenly, he saw her open the curtains of the palanquin in which she was seated, she bit a lotus, put it on her ear, and let it drop. Then she drew the curtains. And was borne away.

The broken-hearted prince did not know what the princess meant when she bit the lotus and dropped it. 'It must be a message,' he thought. 'And yet I don't know what it means. I do not know her name. Or her father's name. Or where she came from.'

Sad at the loss of his love, he went back to his own land. He lay in a dark chamber. Day and night, he refused to eat or drink. His father and mother were sad at his plight. They asked him why he did not want to eat. He did not answer. He would not even see the doctor who came to feel his pulse.

Now the son of the Dewan of the State was a friend of the prince. They had been to school together and were boon companions. When the Dewan's son missed the prince at court, he came to ask where he was?



And here? He found the prince lying in bed. 'What is the matter with you?' he asked. 'Nothing' said the prince.

The Dewan's son knew the prince was in love. Consoling him he said: 'If you tell me about your illness, I will help you.'

'Well,' said the prince at last. 'At the fair on the banks of the Ganga, there came a Raja and put up his camp. He had a beautiful daughter. I heard her sing one day. I am in love with her. I used to see her every day. But I never dared to talk to her. After the fair she went away with her father. Now I don't even know her name. Or the name of her father. Or the name of her country.'

'Oh, that is simple!' said the son of the Dewan, 'I will take you to her! You get up and dress and eat and then we will go!'

'How can you take me to her, when you don't know her name, or the name of her father, or the name of her country?' asked the prince.



'Never you mind,' answered his friend. 'You get up and dress and have your food and I will take you to her.'

The prince got up at once. He broke his fast. And then he was ready to go.

'Did the princess say anything or do anything before she went away?' asked the son of the Dewan.

'*Han*, she had a lotus in her hand,' said the prince. 'She first bit it. Then she put it round her ear. And then she let it fall into the dust!'

'Oh, then her name is the Princess Lotus,' said the friend. 'Come, I will take you to her.'

The prince went to his parents and told them that he wanted to go away to another country for a change of air. Knowing he had been ill, and thinking a change of air would do him good, they let him go. The prince and the Dewan's son mounted their horses and set off together.

In each country they passed, they asked whether a princess named Lotus lived there. But no princess of that name was to be found in mountain cities, or towns on the plains or on the shores of the sea.

They met an old woman on the way. They asked her whether she knew where a princess named Lotus lived?



‘The name of the daughter of the king of this land is indeed Lotus,’ said the old woman. ‘I am her god-mother. I was her nurse. She grew up on my milk.’

The Dewan's son was very clever. He asked the old woman if she could lodge them in her house. The woman liked the two handsome young princes. She agreed to let them stay with her.

When they had been at the old woman's house for some days, the Dewan's son told the story: of how his friend, the prince, had fallen in love with the Princess Lotus. And he asked her to go and tell her godchild, that her lover was longing for her.

The old woman felt sorry for the prince, who had seemed love-lorn ever since he came. She went and gave the message of the Dewan's son to the Princess Lotus. The princess was pleased. She told her nurse to ask the prince to come and see her under the terrace of her palace in the garden at night.

The Dewan's son took the lover to the appointed place. He himself waited outside to see that nobody may come to know of the meeting.

The prince's joy knew no bounds when he met his beloved.

He went to see her every night for a week. At last he asked her to marry him.

The princess told him she would ask her father and mother.

The next day she went to her parents and told them that she had fallen in love with a young prince, who lived in her nurse's house and she wanted to marry him. Her parents called the prince to the palace. Seeing how handsome he was and how brave he looked, they agreed to marry their daughter to him.

The wedding took place with the band playing music. And fire works were let off to make children happy. And sweets were given to all and sundry. Dewan's son was the best man at the ceremony. When the prince went to live at the palace of his wife, he continued to live at the old nurse's house.

At first the prince was very happy.

Then after some months, he began to miss his friend, the Dewan's son. And he felt sad.

'What is the matter?' asked his Rani, when she saw him sad. 'I am sad because I have not seen my friend for so long,' he said. 'Go and see him, then,' she said.

So the prince went to see his friend. He was so happy to see him after a long time. And he stayed a whole week with him.

Now when he went back after a week, the princess was angry, because he had stayed away from her for so long.

The prince told her he could not come back earlier because after staying away from his friend for months, he had so much to say to him. The princess would not listen to his excuses.

Soon, however, she was reconciled with her husband. And they were very happy again. But then, again, the prince felt sad, and wanted to go and see his friend.



'Achha' said the princess, 'go and see him.' Giving him some sweets, she said, 'take these for him as a present from me.'

The prince gave the sweets to his friend, saying that the princess, his wife, had specially made them for him. The Dewan's son put the sweets aside and said he would eat them later. On the prince insisting that he should eat them at once, his friend said:

'Look, I will show you a miracle.'

He broke some of the sweets and threw the pieces to the crows in the courtyard. As soon as the birds pecked at the bits; to the prince's surprise the birds fell dead. A stray dog who came and smelt the food also died.

Now the prince was angry. He decided that he would never go back to the wicked princess who wanted to kill his friend.

A month passed. The Dewan's son tried to persuade the prince to go back to his wife. But he was adamant.

'If you would like to see another miracle,' said his friend 'then go to your wife. And while she is asleep take off all her jewellery and bring it to me. But before you come back, pierce her foot with a trident.'

The prince went to the palace. And he did what his friend had asked him to do.

When the princess awoke and found herself without all her jewellery, she raised a hue and cry.

Her parents rushed to her on hearing her cries. She told them that she had been robbed. The king at once ordered soldiers to bring the culprit before him.

Now the Dewan's son put on the clothes of an ascetic. And, dressing up the prince as his disciple, he asked him to go to the Bazar and sell the ornaments while he himself went and sat by the river.

As the prince was selling ornaments, the soldiers caught him. They asked him how he came by the jewellery.

'I am no thief,' said the prince. 'My teacher, a holy man, gave them to me to sell.'

'Where is this holy man?' they asked. 'Take us to him.' The prince took them to the river.

'What is all this? Are you a mendicant or a thief?' shouted the soldiers when they saw the Dewan's son, who was disguised as a sadhu. 'Tell us where you got these jewels?'

'I am a Sadhu,' answered the prince's friend. 'No thief. I got the jewellery this way: Last night I was sitting here when a woman came. She took a dead body out of the river and began to eat it. This made me angry. I ran after her and attacked her with my trident on the feet. Her jewellery fell off as she ran for her life. I picked it up, I did not know it was your king's daughter.'

The soldiers took the ornaments to the king and told him all that the sadhu had said. The king made enquiries. He found that his daughter had, indeed, received a trident wound on her foot.

'Let her be banished from my kingdom!' ordered the king. 'She is a demoness born in my house.' The soldiers took the princess and left her in the jungle among the wild beasts.

The Dewan's son and the prince returned to the old woman's house. Then, wearing their own clothes, they went to the forest in search of the Princess Lotus.

'Why did you try to poison my friend? Just because I went to see him?' asked the prince when they found her.

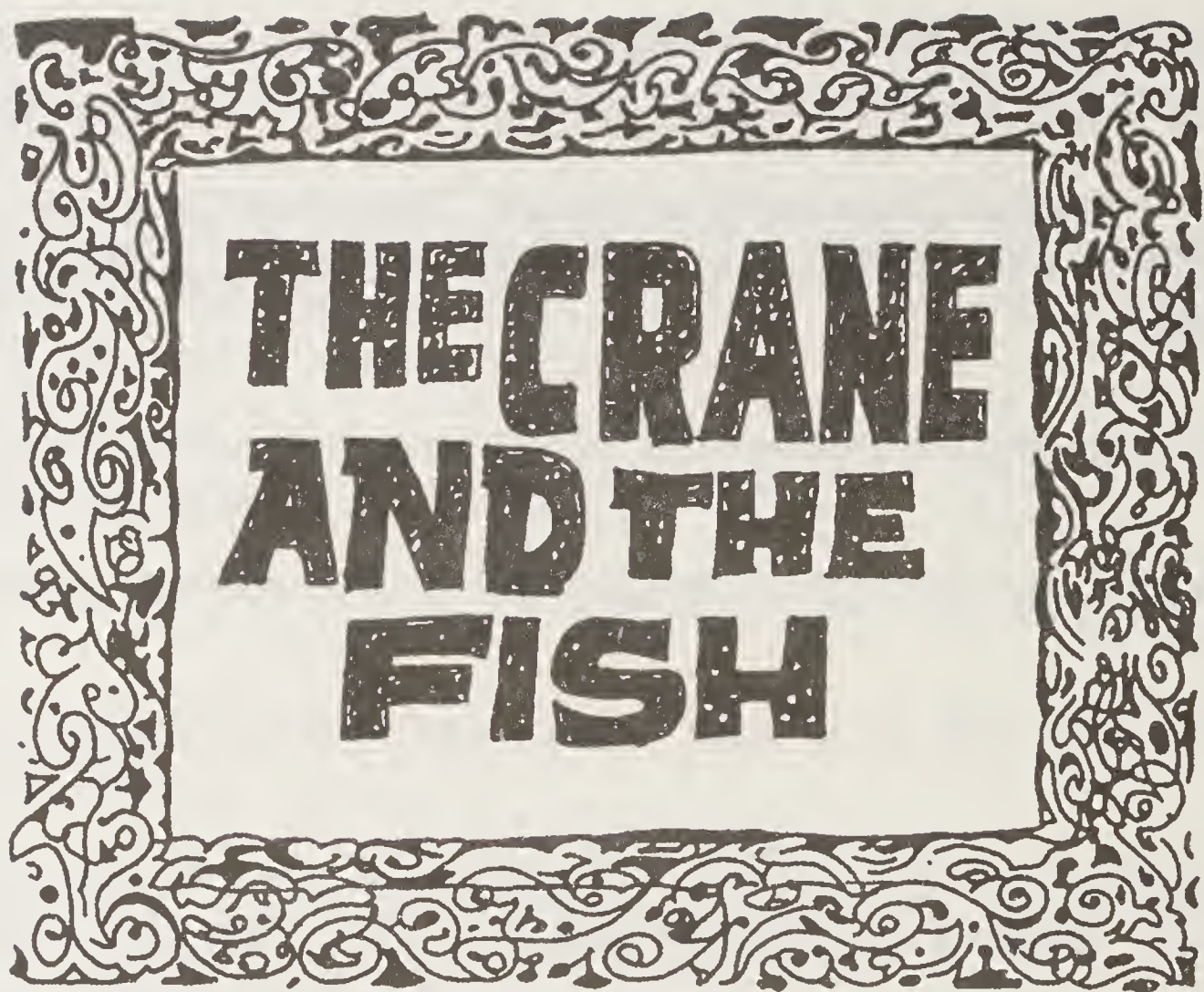
The Princess Lotus wept and cried and said a witch had possessed her.

The Dewan's son recited some holy verses.

The witch who had possessed the princess ran away shrieking.

The Princess Lotus became herself. The prince took her in his arms. And all three went back to the country of the prince's father to live happily ever after.





THE CRANE AND THE FISH

In the centre of a beautiful vale, in the north of Hindustan, is a lake whose stony banks seem to be of emerald, and whose rippling waves are like sapphires, shining in the sun. Here lived the largest number of fishes and crabs and other little water creatures.

Once upon a time, there came a crane from beyond the seas. She was an adventurer. She had heard about the riches and the beauty of this pool. She found that the lake was a good hunting ground for food.

So she went to the crocodile who was the Raja of the place. She asked him for leave to settle down on the banks to do a little trade in spices which grew on the nearby land.

Coo, Coo, Coo, she crooned to the king, flattering him with sweet compliments.

The Raja was a weak and vain ruler. He liked her praise. And he accepted the presents she offered him. And he gave her a chit to trade in his kingdom.

But soon the Raja died. And his son succeeded him. He too died. And his son succeeded him.



Now this new young king was a tyrant. Several people of his land rebelled against him. Some of his nobles became rulers of different parts of the kingdom.

The crane had so far kept up a show of doing trade. But, really, watching the millions of fish in the lake, she hungered to eat them. The troubles in the kingdom gave her a golden chance.

She took sides with one noble in his war against another. She wanted to take over the whole land. As the princes fought each other, the crane told them that she would end their quarrels and bring peace to the kingdom provided they made her Empress of the land, until such time as the fishes were able to rule themselves.

The poor fishes believed the crane. They believed her as she said she did not want to hurt their religious feelings.

But they did not know that every day the Empress devoured many of them in secret.

And they had no idea about the wealth of their country which the crane was sending home. Because she kept telling them that she was only interested in their welfare.

Time passed. And the crane grew more and more greedy. Time

came when she wanted to devour all the fishes. So she pretended to be very sad. Her subjects came to her and asked her what was the matter.

'A twelve-year famine is coming! she said. 'Not a drop of water will remain in the lake and you will all die. If you want to be saved let me carry you out of this water into a sea far away from here!'

The fishes were much touched by the love of the Queen for them. They thanked her gracious majesty. And they begged her to save them from the coming doom. The crane took them one by one in her beak. But while taking them to the other lake she gobbled them all up.

When she had eaten all the creatures of the pool, came the turn of a crab. She offered to take him away too.

'But how will you take me?' he asked. 'Just as I took the fishes-in my beak!' the crane said.

Now the crab was a clever fellow. He knew that the beak of the crane was not very far from her stomach. 'If she really puts me into the other pond,' he thought, 'it would be wonderful. But if she does not, what then?'

So he said to her:



‘Your majesty, I don't think you will be able to hold me tight enough. But we crabs have a good grip. If you will let me catch hold of you round the neck, I shall be glad to go with you.’

The crane was slow-witted. She did not see the cunning of the crab. So she let the crab catch hold of her neck and flew off.

When they had gone a little way, the crane stooped and began to try to catch the crab in her beak.

‘What are you doing?’ asked the crab. ‘Nothing,’ replied the crane. ‘My neck is strained by your weight. So I want to relieve it by holding you in my beak.’

‘No, no,’ said the crab. ‘I shall go to pieces if you drop me, while taking me over from your neck to your mouth.’

‘It does not matter if you fall,’ said the crane. ‘You have to die sooner or later. If you don't get killed by being dropped, you will be chewed up in my mouth very soon. Don't you see those bones there? That is all that remains of your brothers and sisters.’

‘You are very clever,’ said the crab. ‘But I am not such a fool as those fishes! I have got you by the neck. And I shall cut it in two if you extend your beak towards me!’

The cruel crane realized that she had been outwitted. She sobbed and cried:

‘O noble crab, I was only joking with you. Pray don't take offence at what I said. I will not eat you.’



'*Achha*,' said the crab, 'come and put me into the lake from where you brought me.'

The crane turned round and brought the crab back to the pool.

But when she was putting him down she felt a sharp shooting pain in her neck.

The crab had bit her there.

As she was dying, she heard the crab say: 'The end of a wicked Queen is always sudden.'





THE PRINCESS WHO LOVED HER FATHER LIKE SALT

Once upon a time, there lived in the north of Hindustan, a king who had seven daughters. One day he called them all to his court and asked them:

‘Tell me, my children, each of you, how much do you love me?’

The six elder princesses answered one after another. ‘Father, we love you like the sweetest sugar.’

The seventh one remained silent for some time. Then, asked to answer, she said:

‘Father, I love you like salt.’

The king, who had been very pleased to hear the answers of his elder daughters, was very angry at the reply of his seventh daughter. In a rage, he ordered her to get out of his sight and country.

The servants brought a palanquin and carried the youngest princess away to a thick jungle. The poor princess cried and cried at the thought of what would happen to her when the servants left her there. The evening came and she fell asleep.

When she woke up next morning, what was her surprise but to see



a plate full of food and a glass full of water lying by her side. She wondered who could have sent her these in such a lonely spot. She was famished. So she ate the food, and then she prayed to God to show her the person who had saved her life.

She waited and waited for someone to appear, but in vain.

Then she got up and began to look for the person who had given her the food.

After she had walked some distance without finding anyone, she was about to give up her search.

When, lo! right in the heart of the jungle, hidden away among the trees, she saw a marble palace shining in the sunshine.

With great difficulty she made her way through the dense bushes which grew in the jungle. She went and knocked at the palace gates.



No one answered her knock. But the gates flew open. And she saw a milk-white building in the midst of a lovely garden, with a miniature lake of clear, crystal water.

She entered the courtyard of the palace, but no one seemed about. So she tip-toed slowly, through all the beautiful rooms. She saw a beautiful prince asleep, covered with needles from head to foot.

The princess sat down beside him. And she began to pull the needles out of his body. All that day and night and the next day and the next and the next, she was busy, pulling the needles out of the prince's body. Yet there were still more needles to be taken out.

At last, after weeks and weeks of work, all the needles were extracted from the prince's body. Except one which lay stuck in his head. She knew that the prince would wake from his swoon when the last needle was

taken out. So she thought she would go and have a bath in the lake outside and make herself beautiful.

Now the prince had a cruel wife. She was the one who had stuck the needles into his body. When the princess, who loved her father like salt, had gone to bathe, the cruel woman found that all the needles had been taken out of her husband's body. Cunningly, she thought she would take the credit for relieving him of his pain. She took the last needle out and brought him back to life.

When the princess, who loved her father like salt, came back, she heard the prince ask: 'Who has taken the needles out of my body and brought me back to life?' She was going to answer, when a voice from behind a curtain shouted: 'I have-with the help of this new servant, who has come to the palace!'

The princess who loved her father like salt was helpless. She did not want to say anything lest the prince's wife should kill her. So she became a servant in the palace.

The prince recovered his health. He saw the girl working about the house. He thought she was too beautiful to be a servant. But he was afraid of his cruel wife, and dared not say anything.

One day he was going to another country for a change of air. He asked his queen what she would like him to bring back for her. And he also asked the servant girl.

While the queen said she wanted some jewels, and silks, the princess who loved her father like salt, said she would like a small Sun box.





The prince had never heard of such a thing as a Sun box. He did not know what it was like. And how and where it was to be found. But he promised her he would bring it for her.

While he was travelling, he constantly had the Sun box in mind. Everywhere he went he asked for it. But no one had ever heard of such a thing.

The prince was about to return from his holiday. But he still hadn't found the present for the servant girl, and was very sad. As he lay thinking at night, he had a dream in which he saw himself walking through a jungle, near the cottage of a sadhu. The sadhu slept for nine years and then kept awake for ten years afterwards. And he had a Sun box.

The prince mounted his horse next morning. With a few attendants he set out to find the jungle of his dreams. He went on and on. Then he came to a place, where, lo! he saw an ascetic exactly like the one he had seen in his dream. A great many shrubs and plants had grown on the hermit's body which the prince removed. Then having cleaned him, he waited for the divine man to wake up.

The sadhu rose after two weeks. Seeing that there was no ugly growth of grass on his body, he knew that the prince who sat at his feet had removed it. So he blessed him and asked him to beg for a boon.

'I want the Sun box, holy man,' prayed the prince with joined hands. 'You have asked for a difficult thing,' said the sadhu. 'But you are a devoted man. I shall give it to you.'

So saying the ascetic went to a beautiful well. Descending into it he reached the house of the red fairy. He knew she had the Sun box which the prince wanted. He stood in the water chanting a prayer. Soon the fairy appeared.

‘I am at your service, O prince of hermits,’ she said.



‘I want the Sun box, O little one,’ he replied. Down plunged the fairy into the water. In the twinkling of an eye she brought up a beautiful little casket. ‘There are seven small dolls in it,’ she said, ‘and a little magic flute. No one except she who wants it must open it. And she should open it only at night.’

The sadhu thanked her. He went and gave the box to the prince. And he told him all that the fairy had said. The prince was happy. Hiding it securely in the folds of his turban, he begged the sadhu's leave and went away.

When he reached home he called his wife and gave her the presents of silks and jewels he had brought for her. Then he called the princess who loved her father like salt, and gave her the Sun box. She thanked him. As she knew she was not to open it except at night, she took it away and hid it under her pillow.

At night, after her work was finished she went out all by herself into the heart of the jungle. Sitting down in a clearance, she opened the Sun box. The flute and the seven little dolls fell out. She picked up the magic instrument. And, putting it to her lips, began to play. Slowly and silently the dolls began to move in a rhythmic sway around her. They busied themselves, combing her hair, plaiting it and adorning it with flowers. But during this toilet, the princess, who loved her father like salt, wept as she played on the magic flute. The fairies noticed her grief and tried to make her smile. But in vain.

At length one of them dared to ask: 'Why do you cry, O beautiful princess?'

'My father was unjust and cruel,' she replied. 'He sent me away from his kingdom for saying I loved him like salt when my sisters said they loved him like sugar. Also because I love the prince whom I relieved of the pain of the needles thrust into him by his wife.'

'Do not cry, do not cry,' consoled the fairies. 'Everything will be well, by and by.'

The princess then played the flute and sent the fairies into the Sun box. Then she went back to the palace before the dawn.

The next night she took the box again, and went to the same spot in the jungle. Everything happened as on the previous night. Except that a wood-cutter, who was passing through the forest on his way home, was charmed by the music he heard and the dance he saw. Climbing up a tree, he saw the princess weep and wail: "My father was unjust and cruel and sent me away from his kingdom for saying I loved him like salt, when my sisters said they loved him like sugar. And I love the prince

whom I relieved of the pain of the needles thrust into him by his wife.” The third night, the same thing happened. The wood-cutter, who was again on his way home, saw and heard it all. He was very puzzled.

The next day the wood-cutter went to the palace and told the prince about what he had seen. The prince was very much surprised and said: ‘I will come with you and see the miracle for myself.’

That night, before the princess, who loved her father like salt, went out of the palace, the prince came with the wood-cutter and climbed up a tree to watch. Soon he saw the princess come and play on her flute and the fairies come out to dance and sing. Then he saw the princess weep and wail, exactly as the wood-cutter had told him she did.

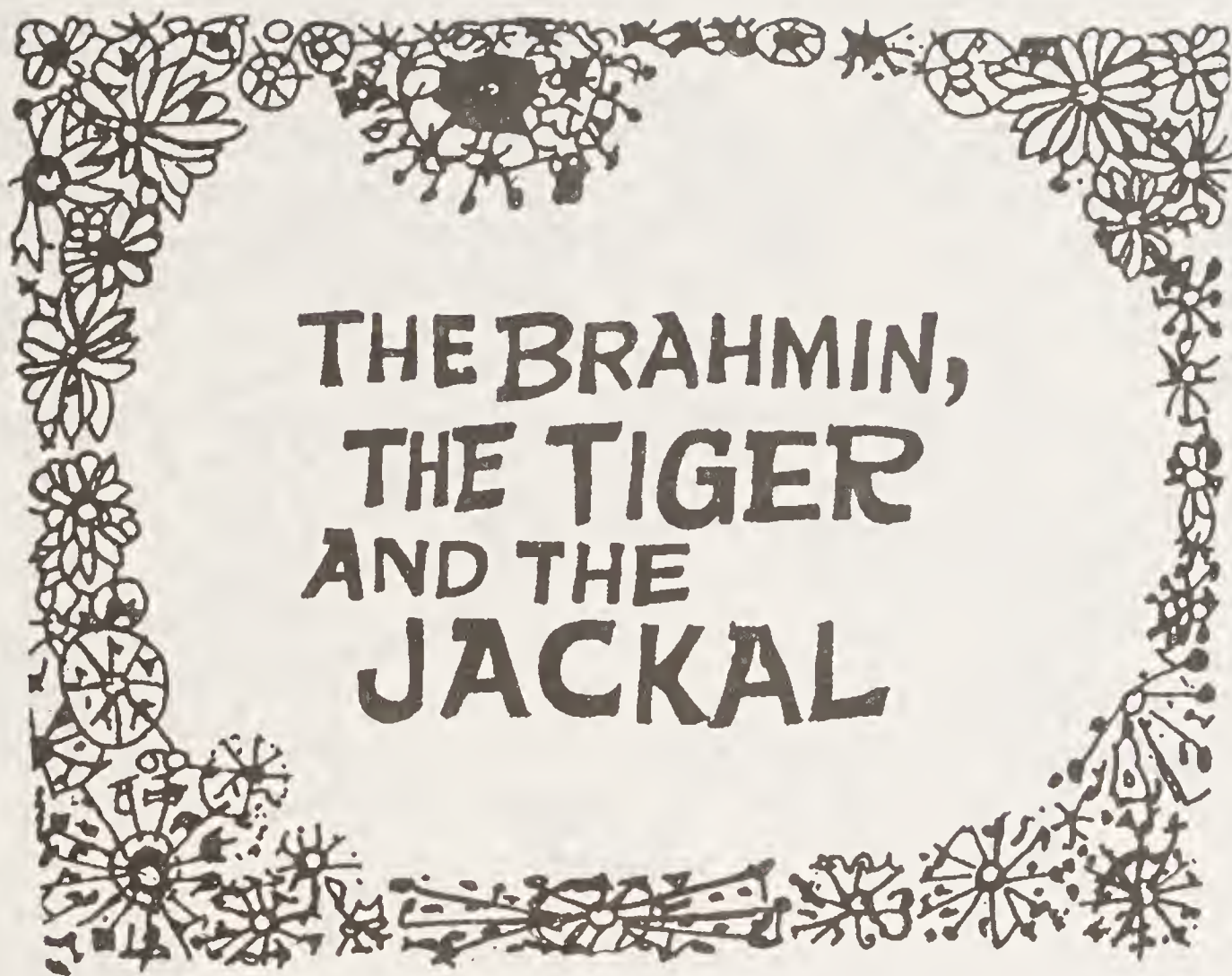
Now the prince who had thought her a servant maid was astonished to know that she was a princess. He jumped down from the tree and came and knelt before her. He begged her to forgive him and marry him. Then he brought her home. And, ordering his cruel queen to be taken away to a far-off island, he began to make preparations for the marriage.

The princess, who loved her father like salt, wrote to her parents and her sisters to come to her wedding.

They all came and were very surprised to see that she was still living. The wedding took place amid beating of drums and playing of flutes. Her relatives stayed with her for some time. For a whole week the princess gave to everybody ordinary food, both sweet and salted. But to her father she gave only sweets, till he got tired of eating sweets every day. At the end of the week, she gave him a salted dish. Then he realized the value of salt. He repented and wept before his daughter for his cruelty. And he gave her and her husband a part of his kingdom.

And they all lived happily ever after.





THE BRAHMIN, THE TIGER AND THE JACKAL

Once upon a time, a Brahmin was going on a pilgrimage, when he came upon an iron cage in which a tiger lay locked up. He pitied the poor beast because it was caged. Then, thinking what a danger to life wild animals are if they are not kept in cages he went his way.

‘O Brahmin! O kind Brahmin!’ called the tiger, because the way farer seemed to him to be a gentle person. ‘Take pity on me!’ he said. ‘Let me out of this cage before you go. I am thirsty and want to go to that stream to drink water.’

‘No, I dare not let you out,’ said the Brahmin, going near the cage. ‘No, I dare not let you out. You will eat me up before you go to drink at the stream. I am afraid...’

‘O holy sage, O truly devoted father!’ appealed the tiger with tears in his eyes. ‘Please take pity on me! Please, please have mercy! I could never be so ungrateful as to eat you in return for your goodness to me. Oh, how could you think of such a thing?’

The Brahmin was moved by the tiger’s appeal. He unlocked the door of the cage, and let the tiger out. Then he hurried on his way, as he



had already been delayed by the tiger. But, to his great surprise, the tiger jumped up before him and, blocking his way, shouted!

‘Stay, O Pundit, stay! You were suspicious and afraid that I might eat you if you let me out of the cage. Now you see, you put the idea of eating you into my head. So I will eat you as I am hungry. Then I will go to quench my thirst. Doctors say it is not good to drink water on an empty belly.’

‘Oh, but you said you will not hurt me if I let you out of the cage!’ said the Brahmin quaking with fear. ‘Aren’t you an ungrateful wretch?’

‘Promise or no promise,’ replied the tiger with a wily look on his face. ‘I am famished! I must eat you! Besides, I cannot neglect the physician’s advice and drink water on an empty stomach.’

The poor Brahmin now stood trembling, unable to say a word. The tiger was impatient for his feed. He came towards him. The Brahmin thought he would try to secure a few more minutes more of life from his enemy, if he could.

‘Listen my friend,’ he said to the tiger, gently but firmly. ‘You were locked up in that cage. I let you out of the cage because you promised

not to hurt me when you were free. But now you want to eat me. Let us go and ask five judges if it is fair that you should eat me.'

'*Achha!*' agreed the tiger. And he walked by the side of the Brahmin to where a banyan tree stood, with a beard like that of a judge.

'O wise old banyan tree, listen and give judgement!' prayed the Brahmin joined hands.

'State your case,' said the banyan tree with hoary dignity.

'This tiger,' said the Brahmin, 'was locked up in a cage. He saw me pass. And he begged me to let him out as he was thirsty and wanted to go to a nearby stream to drink water. I was afraid he would kill me if I opened the doors of the cage. But he vowed he would never think of hurting me. So I let him out. Now he wishes to eat me. Tell me, O wise one, is it just that he should do so?'

'Men often come to rest in the cool shade of my green branches,' said the banyan. 'But in the winter, because they don't need my shelter, they cut the branches and burn my foliage as fuel for their fires. Let the tiger eat the man,—man and his tribe are ungrateful.'

'O wise judge, most truly said!' exclaimed the tiger and jumped towards the Brahmin, saying! 'Now, O pundit, your flesh smells good!'

'Wait, wait, my friend, there are four other judges to be consulted still,' said the Brahmin. And he addressed a dove that sat cooing in her nest in the grove:

'O gentle and most tender one, listen and give judgement.'

'State your case,' said the dove lovingly.

The Brahmin narrated the story of how the tiger had begged to be let out of the cage and had promised not to hurt him, but now wanted to eat him.

'Men like the soft colour of my race,' said the dove. 'And they admire our music. But whenever they see us about, they fling stones at us or cast nets to ensnare us. Man truly is the most ignoble being on earth! Beasts are truly noble! Let the noble prevail.'

'Now.....,' said the tiger turning to his victim.



‘Come, we will ask the opinion of that bullock,’ said the Brahmin, feeling that the domesticated animal might decide in his favour. The tiger followed him, blushing at the nobility that the dove had attributed to him.

‘O sacred bullock! O exalted consort of our holy cow! Listen and give me your most considered judgement,’ said the Brahmin reaching the bullock. ‘I was on my way to a pilgrimage when I came upon this tiger in a cage. He begged to let him loose because he said he was thirsty. I was afraid he might kill me. But he assured me that I would be safe if only I

freed him. So I opened the cage. But as I was proceeding on my journey, he comes and says that he must eat me before he quenches his thirst.'

'You honour me. Pundit, by calling me sacred and holy!' said the bullock. 'But you do this in the hour of your need. It is the way of your tribe. When I was young and strong and worked for one of your brothers, the peasant, he fed me and tended me with care. Now I am old and decrepit. So he had just left me in the wild to fend for myself as best I can. I feel, therefore, that men are ungrateful, the beasts might pay them back in their own coin.'

'I am hungry for your flesh, O pundit! I am hungry!' roared the tiger turning angrily towards the Brahmin.

'Wait, wait, there are two more judges still left for us to consult,' said the Brahmin hoping against hope that some one would recognise the merit of his deed. 'Here's the road. Let me ask its opinion.' And he forthwith explained his cause to the road.

'My good sir,' said the road. 'how can you expect any justice. Look at me. I am useful to everyone, rich and poor. Yet you all trample on me and give me nothing but the ashes of your hookahs and husks of your grain to eat.'

The Brahmin was in despair. Still he hoped to find favour from a jackal whom he saw coming.

'O Uncle jackal, listen and do me justice!' he shouted.

'*Achha!* tell me the whole story from the beginning to the end,' said the jackal.

The Brahmin recited everything that happened in detail.

'Oh how stupid of me, but I haven't got the end or the beginning of your tale. Please tell it to me all over again.'

The Brahmin retold the story.

'It's very odd,' said the jackal shaking his head, 'your words come in from one ear and go out of the other. Now let me see exactly how it all happened. You, my dear Brahmin, I take it, were in the cage and tiger came by...'

'No, No,' interrupted the tiger, 'you are a fool! I was in the cage.'

‘Of course!’ cried the jackal, pretending to be a fool. ‘Yes! I was in the cage—No, I wasn’t—dear dear! What has happened to my brain? Let me see, the cage was in the tiger and the Brahmin came walking by—No, no, that’s not it, either. Well my dear friends, go your way and ask another, for I shall never understand!’

‘To be sure, you will understand,’ said the tiger, in a rage at the jackal’s stupidity. ‘I’ll make you understand!’

‘Look here, I am the tiger—’

‘*Han,*’ said the jackal.

‘And that is the Brahmin—’

‘*Han,*’ agreed the jackal.

‘And that is the cage.’

‘And I was in the cage, you understand?’

‘*Han!* But no! Oh I wish I could see it clearly.’

‘Well, you are a fool, utter fool!’ shouted the tiger.

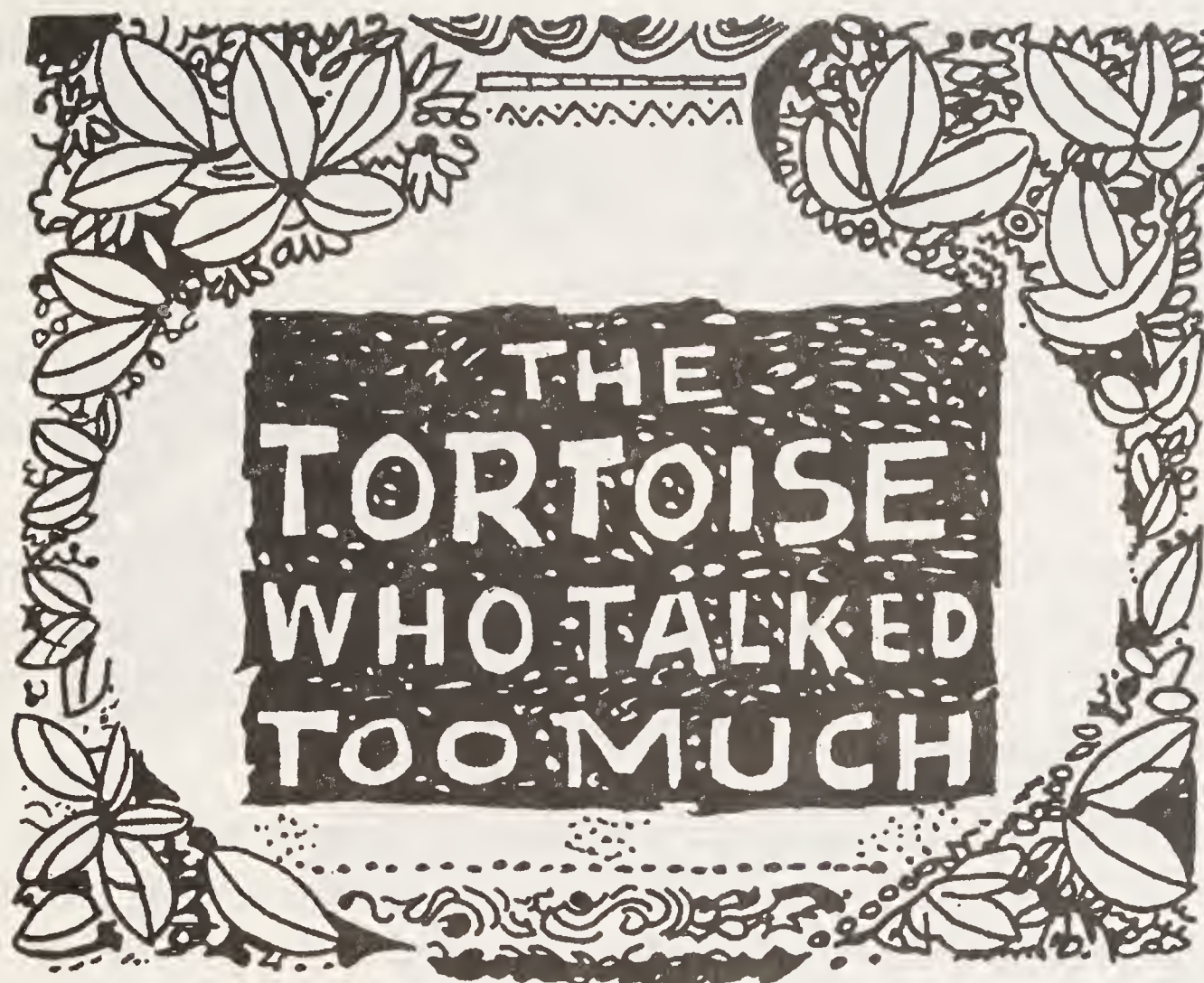
‘*Han,* perhaps I am a fool,’ said the jackal. ‘But I wish I could see how you got into the cage!’

‘How? Well, in the same way I came out—you silly!’ And at this he jumped into the cage and shouted: ‘Like this. Now do you see?’

‘Perfectly!’ said the jackal. Then, moving craftily, he shut the door and locked the tiger in.

And the Brahmin thanked the jackal for his help and walked away.





Once upon a time there was a king who talked too much. He was always asking his ministers silly questions. When he had no questions to ask he worried them by telling them things they did not want to know. While he was talking, nobody could get a word in edgeways.

Now, the king's prime minister was a very wise man and he wanted to cure his master of his talkativeness. But he dared not tell the king openly not to talk too much, lest he should be angry and have him killed. So he waited patiently for an opportunity to offer itself.

One day, his chance came. The king had been babbling, babbling and babbling all day long till his throat was hoarse and he had lost his voice and could not talk any more. Since, he was eager to continue the conversation but could not talk, he asked his prime minister to tell him a tale. The wise prime minister gladly agreed and recited the following story:

Once upon a time, there lived in a small lake in the Himalayas a tortoise who talked too much. All his neighbours in the pool were tired of answering his eternal whys and wherefores and bored with his unending gossip. So tired were they of him that they would slip away quietly, whenever they saw him approaching.

The tortoise felt very lonely, for he loved talking and he had no one to talk to. At length, two wild geese descended on the pond to rest a while on their way to the lake Mansarovar. The talkative tortoise, knowing that they were strangers and therefore would listen to him, went to them and engaged them in conversation.

‘What country do you come from? What is your name? What is your profession?’ He fired question after question, without waiting for an answer.

The geese were very amused. And, as they were only staying for a while, they did not have time to know that the tortoise was only a very talkative here. So they eagerly responded to his questions and readily listened to his gossip.

The tortoise was sad at the thought of losing two friends, as soon as he had found them, for he knew that they were only staying a little while and then going away. An idea occurred to him, however, and said: ‘I am tired of the apathy of my neighbours in this pool. Could you not take me with you to the lake Mansarovar?’

‘Very well,’ agreed the wild geese, amused by this novel suggestion.

So they held a stick in their beaks: the tortoise held the middle of it between his teeth and they flew off into the air slowly. But they had not gone very far over the hills, when a crow noticed them and called to the other birds, ‘O friends, O friends, come and see this peculiar sight! ‘O friends, O friends, come and see this peculiar sight!’ repeated a parrot after the crow, as he approached with other birds.

‘What is there so funny about it?’ blurted out the tortoise immediately. He lost his hold of the stick in his anxiety to talk, fell on the rocks and was killed instantaneously.

When the recital was finished, the king asked the prime minister to tell him the moral of the story. The wise prime minister brought home the meaning in the following verse:-

Verily the tortoise was killed,
who talked too much;
For he could not be stilled



And talked too much
Listen, then, O king,
Speak wise words, few and in season
To, talk over much, O king,
Disturbs the reason.

The king realized the folly of talking too much and became a man of few words, he spoke wisely and in season.





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